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Throughout *The House of Mirth,* by Edith Wharton, we constantly see the words beauty, grace and charm appearing in the novel. When we think of these words, most of the time they initiate positive thoughts, but Lily Bart is able to alter our thinking. She is a perfect example of how beauty is not always a good thing like people often portray it to be.

First of all, when we think of the time period that it was written, beauty for a woman was considered more valuable than having good communication skills and being intelligent. The book clearly picks up upon this point when Seldon observes Lily and mentions how “…her grace cheapening the other women’s smartness as her finely discriminated silences made their chatter dull” (Wharton 188). Just because Lily is beautiful she is able to rise above the rest of the crowd and people seem to take more notice of her. This isn’t necessarily a positive thing because since she stands out, people are prone to direct their attention to her and talk negatively about her. We see this later on when it comes to Bertha.

Furthermore, the main reason Lily was invited on the cruise with Bertha is because she wanted Lily’s beauty to distract her husband so he wouldn’t find out about her affair with Ned Silverton. The novel states how “The Silverton affair is in the acute stage: it’s necessary that George’s attention should be pretty continuously distracted. And I’m bound to say Lily does distract it…” (Wharton 165). We all know that if Lily was ugly, she would never be used in this way and some problems she faced in the book never would have happened, especially when it comes to being accused of having an affair with George Dorset (Wharton 190). Since Lily is beautiful and unmarried, Bertha is easily able to convince people that Lily and her husband are messing around. This illustrates how beauty, most of the time, isn’t a good thing for Lily to have. Sometimes she would be better off being plain like Gerty since Gerty never faces the same troubles that Lily does.

Lily’s goal when going on the cruise was to change her surroundings in order to get away from the drama and having to face her debt obligations. She describes her vacation spot in great detail. Lily explains how “unclouded sunlight enveloped sea and shore in a bath of purest radiancy… How beautiful it was – and how she loved beauty” (Wharton 170). Lily assumes that since she is in a beautiful place, she can just sit back and enjoy life, but as we find out this isn’t the case. She ends up being outcasted by Bertha and in return she is forced to leave. This shows how beauty, in any shape or form, can be deceiving.

Lily receives another important lesson on beauty when she gets back home and tries to get her aunt’s inheritance early. Lily “…resolved to try the effort of a personal appeal; but she returned from her expedition with a sense of the powerlessness of beauty and charm against the unfeeling processes of the law” (Wharton 201). Lily learns that beauty can’t do everything for you and it isn’t always an effective tool to have.

In conclusion, Lily Bart exemplifies the downfalls of beauty. Even though society tends to see it in a positive light, Lily is able to depict it in a different point of view. Appearances are not always as they seem. Something or someone might look appealing but until you take the time to look deeper, you will never understand the obstacles that come along with being beautiful.